Buddhist And Scientific Philosophical Perspectives in The Diamond Sutra

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted

as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,

and that it is entirely my own work.

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Buddhist And Scientific Philosophical Perspectives in the Diamond Sutra

Abstract

Buddhist core teachings emphasize emptiness and interconnectedness, emphasizing that there is no inherent self, that all phenomena arise and cease, and that they depend on causes and conditions. The Buddha's radiant, beautiful last verse concludes the Diamond Sutra, stating that all forms are illusory, temporal, transient, and constantly in flux. In this paper, I will present the basis of illusion through the deception of perception, conventional concepts, and the relationship between reality and appearances. We will never be able to see the true nature of existence in the physical world. In his last compilation, “Out of My Later Years "(1950), Albert Einstein writes that science without religion is lame, and religion without science is blind. Einstein declares that if modern science could substantiate any religion, it would be Buddhism. Therefore, I will present scientific research that supports the philosophical foundations of Buddhism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

It has been over 2,500 years since the Buddha taught about the form's ephemeral, illusory nature. It is such a profound realization that science has only started to grasp its depth and research its implications over the past 200 years. The Jewel saying quoted in the Diamond Sutra is that all phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, a morning dew, or a flash of lightning. The Diamond Sutra is a central Mahayana Buddhist Sutra from the group of Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom). It is one of East Asia's most influential Mahayana holy scriptures, particularly prominent in Chan (or Zen) tradition, along with the Heart Sutra (Lopez, 2009; Conze, 1975; McRae, 2003)[1]. The Diamond Sutra is probably one of their group's best-known texts, along with the 18 smaller texts and their commentaries. The discourse setting was at Jeta Grove, in the city of Sravasti, in the presence of the Buddha and his disciples. Buddha teaches Subhuti, one of the Buddha's important disciples, who is renowned for his profound understanding of emptiness and his insightful dialogue about the teachings. The Sanskrit title of the Sutra is Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra, which roughly translates as "The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusions." This concept refers to the Buddhist notion of Prajna-Wisdom, metaphorized as an indestructible diamond that cuts through ignorance and reveals the true nature of reality. The Diamond Sutra holds historical significance; according to the article "Buddhism on the Ground,"[2] Wang Yuanlu opened the Library Cave in Dunhuang, where he discovered tens of thousands of paper and silk manuscripts, mainly comprising

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[1] Conze, E. (1975). *The Diamond Sutra and The Heart Sutra: Translated with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Harper & Row.
Lopez, D. S. Jr. (2009). *The Heart Sutra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries*. SUNY Press.
McRae, J. (2003). *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. University of California Press.

[2] Lama, G. K. (2022). *Buddhism on the Silk Route*. Sharada Publishing House.

Buddhist texts. One of the most significant sutras in the library is a Chinese copy of the Diamond Sutra, dated 868 CE, the world's earliest dated printed book (International Dunhuang Program (IDP)).

The key teachings in the Diamond Sutra revolve around emptiness (sunyata), no-self (anatta), non-attachment, transcending duality, and the limitations of conceptual thinking.

All phenomena are empty of true self-nature, with no separate self, and are dependent on conditions and causes to appear or disappear. They are illusions, so no one should cling to the form of their existence.

The purpose of this study

Problems

Buddha says in the Diamond Sutra that all forms are illusory. We see an illusion because all phenomena are empty of a fixed Self, of actual inherent existence. Non-Buddhist believers pose the problem of not understanding that we do not exist, and question whether, if there is no self, then who is suffering in this reality? Each person has different beliefs and religions that understand the self differently. In Buddhism, for instance, there is little need to convince people to accept Buddhism's essential teaching of no self or emptiness, as scientific research results of this new Age support what the Buddha's teachings are. It is dogmatic yet, at the same time, supported by science.

Research Questions

My research question is: Based on the Diamond Sutra, how are Buddhist teachings on Form and Emptiness considered illusory, and how do contemporary scientific and philosophical results from the New Age support these teachings? Therefore, in this thesis, I will discuss the profound ideas of Form, which are illusory, No Self-concept based on The Leading to the Heart of Diamond by Venerable Thich Huyen Chau, the book and YouTube "Reality is just an illusion" by Dr. Donald Hoffman, "the Convergence of Science and Spirituality" by Donald Hoffman and Rupert Spira and other articles.

Chapter 2: Literature review

1. Leading into the Heart of Diamond by Venerable Thich Huyen Chau

In this article, Venerable Thich Huyen Chau guides practitioners to gain a profound and practical understanding of the Diamond Sutra, revealing that ultimate wisdom (Prajna) lies in non-attachment and non-abidance, and that all phenomena are ultimately illusory. Most known are the empty self and the Dharma. Through the commentary, he emphasizes what the Buddha teaches: enlightenment does not involve acquiring or attaining anything but releasing all attachments and conceptions and realizing the unconditional, non-conceptual nature, non-arising, ineffable essence of all phenomena. His commentary is not an abstract philosophy but a practical teaching on upholding the Dharma.

2. Reality is just an illusion by Donald Hoffman

In supporting the idea “Reality is an Illusion,” through his book The Case Against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes (2018), Donald Hoffman explains that what we see, and experience is not the real world, but rather a most fitting version created by our minds to help us survive. According to his research, evolution has shaped our senses to adapt to the environment, enhancing our chances of survival and reproduction. For example, animals camouflage their skin to match their environment, allowing them to survive more effectively. According to Darwin’s theory, fitness means reproductive success.

Evolution does not provide us with an entirely accurate picture of reality, but it is a useful one that helps us function effectively. Hoffman provides an example of computer usage that serves as an excellent metaphor for explaining the teachings of no-self (anatta) and emptiness (Sunyata) in Buddhist philosophy, as well as Donald Hoffman's scientific perception model. Hoffman describes the computer desktop interface as analogous to our perception of reality. The icons on the screen, such as a folder or a trash bin, are not the actual reality of the system; they are a useful illusion, a simplified interface that helps one interact with complex processes inside the machine. Buddhist teachings on the concept of no self are similar. Like a desktop icon, we call a self a convenient label, a functional illusion used to navigate the world. The trash icon is not a real trash bin; the self is not a real, independent entity as we think it is. We use computer screens with icons for easy usage (an easy-to-use version of reality), but hiding beneath is a complex problem of all zeros and ones’ mathematical processing inside the machine. Explained, what we see and use the functions of the computer on the outside, are not the real wires, circuits, and chips, and all invisible computations with transactions of hundreds of thousands of zeros and ones are mathematical processes beneath the computer case, just as phenomena appearances, are

empty of a fixed self, constantly process depend on the arrival of temporal causes and conditions, (just as we change functions), so exhibitions do not represent the absolute Truth.

3 - The Convergence of Science and Spirituality by Donald Hoffman and Rupert Spira

In this YouTube video, Donald Hoffman and Rupert Spira explain how modern physics and the spiritual wisdom of non-duality point to the ultimate truth: that consciousness is fundamental. It is not a matter of the physical world that materialist assumptions suggest the brain creates consciousness. Dr. Hoffman says that things like space, time, and objects are tools our minds use to survive, not actual reality. Spira, a spiritual teacher, says that everything we experience comes from one shared Consciousness; they both believe that the world does not exist outside of awareness, that everything we know happens inside consciousness.

Buddha says that form is illusory, taught through the Diamond Sutra, concluded with the radiant, beautiful paragraph:

"All conditioned phenomena
It is like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow,
Like morning dew or a flash of lightning.
Thus should one contemplate them."[3]

The example "form" is a transient, impermanent phenomenon that is not worth suffering. Buddhist texts state a close connection between the existence of illusion and the reality of suffering.[4]. Because when one clings to form, something that is impermanent, constantly changing, one will suffer when these forms cease to exist. Sentients harbor the wrong view,

[3] Venerable Thich Huyen Chau, Leading into the Heart of Diamond (2023)
[4] Jan Westerhoff, *The Twelve Examples of Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 7

seeing forms through their lenses of perspective, not the actual reality as they are. “Illusion is not something that does not exist, but something that is not what it seems; how they appear is different from how they are.”[5] So, when the image does not represent reality, our views, beliefs, and reasoning are also false, leading to erroneous choices.

Buddha was not interested in theology or cosmology. His primary concerns were psychological, moral, and practical. He planned a path that would lead beings out of suffering, as illustrated below:

1. We see the world as it comes in each moment, rather than as one we think, hope, or fear of.
2. We base our actions on reality instead of on our emotions.
3. We should live with compassion, in line with reality.
4. The path to follow to attain Awakening[6]

Buddha advises us to eradicate attachments, let go of the self-notion, transcend duality, and then the actual reality will be unveiled. With a clear mind, not consumed by emotions or illusion, our actions will tend to align with Real Nature. Buddha teaches the eightfold path as guidance for sentient beings to practice to reach enlightenment, saying “Be a lamp unto yourself,” which means we should cultivate our wisdom through our upholding and understanding the dharma, shed ignorance, be self-sustained, not relying on external force or guidance or another individual. Buddha admonishes us to stand upon our own two feet and walk the Way through our effort.” [7]

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[5] Jan Westerhoff, *The Twelve Examples of Illusion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 7
[6] Hagen, S. (2003). *Buddhism is not what you think: Finding freedom beyond beliefs*. Harper One.
[7] Kosei-kai International. (n.d.). *Make yourself the light; make the Dharma your light*. https://rk-world.org/basic-buddhism/make-yourself-the-light-make-the-dharma-your-light/

The Diamond Sutra's key concepts are:

1. Emptiness: All phenomena are empty of fixed-self
2. Do not attach to any phenomena or concepts
3. True wisdom is inconceivable
4. Practice Generosity without Attachment

1. Emptiness

It is a key concept of Buddhism in the Diamond Sutra[8], and all phenomena are empty of a fixed self. Buddha teaches that there is no fixed identity, which is called anatta. The phenomenon superficially manifests itself (Lu & Cheung, 2007)[9]It lacks a solid existence; the "emptiness" of intrinsic existence cannot exist independently of its nature, or separate from other things; what the Buddha teaches in the Diamond Sutra is the opposite.

The six evanescent phenomena—dream, illusion, bubble, shadow, dew, and lightning—are powerful metaphors for explaining the impermanence and emptiness of all forms, such as Rupa. The dream vanishes upon waking up; the illusion is a deceiving reality. The shadow depends on light and form, which have no substance, just as our sense of self and ego. The dew evaporates quickly, and the lightning disappears in an instant.

[8]Soeng, M. (2000). *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the way we perceive the world*. Wisdom Publications, p. 29
[9]Soeng, M. (2000). *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the way we perceive the world*. Wisdom Publications, p. 29
p. 29

Everything in the physical and mental world: objects, body, thoughts, emotions, time, space, arises due to conditions and causes, which means they are conditioned phenomena, therefore impermanent and empty of self.

According to Chen and Shang (2010, p.8), this example helps practitioners realize that all phenomena are empty, thus liberating them from clinging to their superficial manifestations and reducing sentient minds.[10]

The Diamond Sutra uses the visual metaphor that form is associated with the five levels of eyes. Based on the SBU Commentaries from Ven. Thich Huyen Chau, chapter 18, p. 140 "All thoughts are connected", the five eye levels are: 1- The physical eye of sentient beings, 2. The divine eye is the vision of the Gods of the Form Realm, 3- The wisdom eye, 4- The Dharma eye, and 5- The Buddha eye can see or perceive everything. More in-depth details and explanations of the Five Eyes levels are discussed later in this dissertation. Still, it paradoxically suggests that "Seeing is not knowing" because all are forms, therefore empty, not the genuine Real. The most obvious example is when Buddha asks if people can see through his 32 marks, and if one says yes, they do not truly understand the Buddha or his teachings. If people think of Buddha as the image of a person with great physical features, they do not comprehend the Buddha's teachings because they see the external Buddha with form, the world of appearances. Buddha teaches that all forms are illusory and impermanent. The Buddha's body will age like ours, and his beautiful marks will fade. The real Buddha is the manifestation of wisdom, compassion, and emptiness. A Buddha's true nature goes beyond form, image, and physical features; the awakened mind is empty, formless, and beyond duality.

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[10] Soeng, M. (2000). *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the way we perceive the world*. Wisdom Publications, p. 253

“See all appearances as no appearances,” means to realize that all appearances are superficial, hence, empty, and “see the Tathagata” means understanding the Tathagata’s dharma and finding genuine wisdom (c.f. Master Hsuan Hua 2002, p. 253[11].

According to Julian Maher in “In Search of No-Self, Buddhist anatta theory rejects the notion of the Western concept of personal identity. In Buddhism, the self is an illusion, a creation of the mind.” [12]

The self is unsubstantiated since it is empty of independent self-nature. It comprises aggregates constantly in flux, in a dynamic state, changing according to the temporal causes and conditions that arrive. People are mistaken when they say Buddha teaches a “nihilistic doctrine of No Self.”[13]. The Buddha explains that what people call the self is not fixed; it is a flow of conditions, body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. When you see this clearly, you stop clinging and suffering. Buddha teaches ethics, compassion, karma, and enlightenment, all things nihilism rejects.

“In Buddhism, the realization of anatta, or no-self, is usually considered an outcome of insight (mindfulness or vipassana) meditation at a relatively high stage.”[14]Buddhist meditation

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[11] Soeng, M. (2000). *The Diamond Sutra: Transforming the way we perceive the world*. Wisdom Publications, p. 253

[12] Maher, J. (2006). *In search of no-self: An installation exploring relations between notions of selfhood, transcendentalism, and sublimity* (Master’s thesis, AUT University, Te Wānanga Aronui o Tamaki Makaurau). AUT Library. p. 11

[13] Shrader, D. W. (n.d.). *Between self and no-self: Lessons from the Majjhima Nikāya*. [Publisher]. p.1

[14] Engler, J., & Fulton, P. R. (2012). Self and no-self in psychotherapy. In C. K. Germer & R. D. Siegel (Eds.), *Wisdom and compassion in psychotherapy: Deepening mindfulness in clinical practice* (pp. 111–125). Guilford Press.

practitioners who see the self's impermanence and fleeting nature as the essence of wisdom will be less attached to cravings and desires and suffer less.

2. Letting go of concepts

In the Diamond, Buddha teaches beings not to attach to concepts, fixed ideas, that Bodhisattva should not think of beings as real existing beings to be liberated (Chapter 3, SBU Leading into the Heart of Diamond, p. 32, Thich Huyen Chau), he advises sentient to let go of the concepts such as “non-self” or attaining “enlightenment”. Western philosophers spent years conducting research that led to the concept of an ego with existence. “The ego is now understood in representation (Rothenstein, 1981) as well as functional terms, with the former stressing the process by which a picture of the self and world is built up out of mental images.” “Freud’s (1923) states that the ego is that which master the tension, control intrinsic, regulates the drive.”[15] However, meditation practice, authors say, exposes the representations through “nonjudgmental light of mindfulness " and permits a simultaneous dis-identification of self-image.[16]

Ajahn Brahm discusses letting go of labels and persons, stating that labeling people and the mind distorts the view, and giving the “Insight: Labels are like prison cells with the keys on the inside. Understanding the prison cell of limiting belief allows one to open the cell door and walk out.”[17] This is a teaching from Buddha that one should go beyond words and concepts. Words and

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[15] Epstein, M. (2008). The deconstruction of the self: Ego and “egolessness” in Buddhist insight meditation. In *Psychotherapy without the self: A Buddhist perspective* (pp. 42–54). Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300150254-004 p. 63

[16] Epstein, M. (2008). The deconstruction of the self: Ego and “egolessness” in Buddhist insight meditation. In *Psychotherapy without the self: A Buddhist perspective* (pp. 42–54). Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300150254-004 p. 65

[17] Da Costa, L. (2014). *Buddhist teachings: The art of letting go, inspired by the talks of Ajahn Brahm*. Lulu.com. p. 34

names are valuable tools to navigate the conventional world, yet they have no real sense in the ultimate world.

In “Going on Being, " Mark Epstein talks about self and non-self, saying, “when the Buddha taught his middle path system that both the somebody and nobody views were mistakes. The notion of somebody is the clinging to being, while nobody is the clinging to non-being.”[18] This thinking constrains people from realizing the True Nature of all things, confining all in the illusion of Form, Existence, and Lasting.

3 – True Wisdom Goes Beyond Words

David Weddle describes the insight beyond words that came to Siddhartha: "All Buddhas, of the past, present, or future, bound irrefutable Transcendent Wisdom, reach complete understanding and the highest awakening.” At that point, Buddha knew all “as it was”. His awakening was not a revelation of truth from a deity; Buddha realized the truth concerning his being, insight into the nature of existence that was acquired through lessons learned in thousands of past lifetimes. As this ignorance uprooted, he became the perfectly wise, the Tathagata.”[19] The deep understanding that comes to Siddhartha Gautama as “transcendental” wisdom is an awareness that surpasses ordinary knowledge or thinking. The Sutras say, " Past, present, future Buddhas reach full, perfect awakening through this unfaltering, transcendent wisdom.” At this awakening, the Buddha sees things exactly as they are, clearly and without illusion. This awakening stems from

[18] Epstein, M. (2009). *Going on being: Life at the crossroads of Buddhism and psychotherapy*. Wisdom Publications. p.6
[19] Weddle, D. L. (2010). Buddhism: Signs of transcendent wisdom. In *Miracles: Wonder and meaning in world religions* (pp. 105–140). New York University Press.p.110

the Buddha's realization within, gained through many lives of learning, contemplation, and experience, and was not bestowed by God.

Dhamma Priya Bhikkhu et al. describe their view of true wisdom as beyond words when analyzing the distinction between the "language of conceptual understanding and direct experience"[20]. The article explores the connection between language, learning, and our understanding of knowledge, highlighting how they interact and influence one another. It shows how the process of gaining knowledge supports a spiritual journey. The article states that language has limits and cannot fully describe the most profound truths about reality. The article suggests that to understand the fundamental truths truly, one must go beyond words and ordinary ways of thinking. "Language is a primary medium for communication and expression. It enables people to converse, exchange ideas, and build on the intellectual achievements of others. Language structure shapes how we perceive and understand the world; it influences our thought processes, creating conceptual frameworks to interpret reality."[20] However, Buddha teaches that language is only a skill he uses to create a route for people to traverse the conventional world. He employs analogies and metaphors to guide beings to Enlightenment. He emphasizes that teachings are tools to be left behind once wisdom is attained. In this way, language is a helpful tool for conveying Dhamma and guiding people toward awakening, but it is not the ultimate destination. The true goal, which is Enlightenment, goes beyond words.

Going further into the idea of "Wisdom is beyond Words," Buddha says he never uttered a word, as in Chapter 21, "Subhuti, one who sees the dharma as having spoken by the Tathagata, misperceived it". If he thinks Buddha has spoken spiritual truths, he slanders the Buddha due to

[20] Bhikkhu, D. P. (2025). Language and the pursuit of knowledge: A Buddhist philosophy perspective. *Journal of MCU Languages and Cultures*, *4*(2), 53–67. https://so08.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JMLC/article/download/4298/3394

his inability to understand what the Buddha teaches."[21] This is a teaching of the Diamond Sutra that the ultimate wisdom (Prajna-paramita) cannot be fully expressed in words. Buddha uses these words to point the way. The truth itself goes beyond language and form, just as the metaphor of the finger points to the moon, the word, the language is comparable to the Dhamma, the Way, and the moon is the proper Destination one wants to attain.

In the Lankavatara Sutra, "Words are not the ultimate, nor is what is expressed by words the ultimate." In her article "Why the Buddha Never Uttered a Word," Mario D'Amato explains that Buddhism considers that "language and conceptualization are at the root of the problems with sentient beings; they are fundamental afflictions (klesas) leading to the suffering of sentient beings. The Mahayanasutralamkana-bhagya states that conceptualization (vikalpa) is the only affliction of concern to Bodhisattvas. Vimalakirti-nirdesa claims that the root of desire and greed are the basic afflictions, warning against conceptual constructions."[22]

4. Practice Generosity without Attachment

In Buddhism, there are four types of generosity: giving material things, giving of fearlessness, giving dhamma, and giving loving kindness. Buddha teaches that one should give without clinging to ideas of self, others, sentient beings, lifespan, bound by the notions of giver & receiver, or thinking this is a gift. Practice generosity without desire; otherwise, "egoism" will be present. True generosity is free from ego, pride, or expectation. Giving material things related to the donation of the body and its organs, the utmost example of the Buddha is when he gives his body to a hungry tigress, so she has enough strength and milk for her cubs. In this new age

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[21] Venerable Thich Huyen Chau (2023). Leading into the heart of Diamond

[22] D'Amato, M. (2009). Why the Buddha never uttered a word. In M. D'Amato, J. L. Garfield, & T. J. F. Tillemans (Eds.), *Pointing at the moon: Buddhism, logic, analytic philosophy* (pp. 41–55). Oxford University Press. people

society, human life is regarded as precious; it would be against the law to deliberately take away one's life in exchange for another, needless to save an animal. When studying Buddhism, I believe that imparting fearlessness is a unique and special characteristic of Buddhist teachings. We all need to pray for protection from the upheavals of life leading to suffering, which points out our helplessness and marks the vulnerability of our mental state, while giving fearlessness depicts the inner strength, the confidence, and an action mode instead of a passive mentality.

Buddha considers teaching Dhamma to have the highest merit and the supreme of all material offerings, no matter how enormous, because Dhamma eventually leads to liberation, ending suffering and the Cycle of Birth. While material giving is finite and occurs in Samsara, afflictions and suffering recur.

Regarding the giving of love and compassion, the Dalai Lama says, Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World (Dalai Lama, 2013, p. 150), "It is important to recognize that generosity here refers not just to giving in a material sense, but also generosity of the heart, as to the virtue of forgiveness. Without generosity of the heart, genuine forgiveness is impossible."[23] Buddhism emphasizes giving with respect and honesty, in times of need, and without attachment; it also calls for non-violence and peace. The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, Vol. II, translated by the Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, Tsong-kha-pa (2002:129) "by charity without hurting anyone else you will obtain stable resources; by giving while bearing unpleasantries you will have an intimate companion."[24] It says that donating and helping without harming anyone creates good karma or favorable conditions for oneself, i.e., happiness or a

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[23] Dorjey, T. (2018). An aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics: The culture of generosity (dāna). *SOSHUM: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora*, 8(1), 1–10.
[24] Dorjey, T. (2018). An aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics: The culture of generosity (dāna). *SOSHUM: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora*, 8(1), 1–10.

secure, steady income. Furthermore, if one shares even under challenging situations, people will see one's kindness and develop closeness, trust, and love toward the one who cares. This is a universal law that one reaps what one sows: "Giving is an important aspect of Sila. Buddhists of all traditions stress this aspect of ethics. Being generous is an important development that can end egoism. When we have attachment, we are selfish and egoistic because of our ignorance. We must cut attachment to worldly pleasure, and giving is an effective antidote for egoism."[25] "Buddhism asserts that Generosity develops our mind, loving kindness, morality, and spirituality"[26], affirms that "Generosity is the opposite of misery. Giving provides a base of contentment, joy, and delight."[27] This is true in most instances, but to the extent of giving away his wife and his children as recounted in one of Buddha's past lives, Buddha, as Prince Vessantara, gave his wife to become a servant for the hermit Jujaka. He also gave away his two children. First, Prince Vessantara's wife and children are not the commodities he possessed; they are human beings with emotions and thoughts. They are not things to be given away. They are sentient beings. This act demonstrates Prince Vessantara's boundless generosity but creates tremendous hardship, affliction, and suffering for his family. The example also indicates gender discrimination in the old times; he may donate his limbs, his body, because they are his, but he cannot sacrifice someone else's life (his wife, his children) because of the protocol that he had to go through to advance. One gives what one has, not by taking away from someone else. I feel sympathy for this family and do not see loving kindness or morality in this example; I think it is marked by inconsideration and selfishness. Mehm Tin Mon discusses utmost generosity in the

[25] Patetta, H. (2020). Karma and generosity. *eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies*, 7, 1–10.
[26] Barua, R. (2022). The significance of the perfection of generosity (Dāna Pāramī) in the Pāli Nikāya literature. *eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies*, *9*, 42–58.
[27] Barua, R. (2022). The significance of the perfection of generosity (Dāna Pāramī) in the Pāli Nikāya literature. *eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies*, *9*, 42–58.

Vessantara Jataka instance, saying, "King Vessantara practiced an extreme form of generosity by offering his wife and children. Nowadays, we consider it criminal. In The Jataka stories recounting the previous lives of the Buddha, all future Buddhas (Bodhisattva) had to observe extreme generosity practices, offer all their possessions, their children, their wives, parts of their body, and finally their life to attain enlightenment, the Buddhahood."[28] Mehm Tin Mon says that King Vessantara believed himself absolved for his extreme generosity because, before giving away the children, he instructed them to inform their grandfather to recover them. Tin Mon reasons that the future Buddha had to observe such extreme generosity to attain enlightenment. When he became the Buddha, he prohibited such extreme generosity, not receiving bulls, enslaved people, and women from donors. Vessantara's extreme generosity was just a display, following the required steps on the path, which was not true from his heart, so merit should not be created. Buddha saw the vanity of such an act; he forbade it. Mehm Tin Mon advises people not to observe such extreme practices in the modern day."[29]

In short, Buddhism teaches that true generosity stems from compassion, rather than using it for self-interest. There are four types: giving things, giving safety, giving teachings, and giving love. Real giving means helping without expecting anything back or clinging to ideas of self or others. As one of Buddha's past life stories, Prince Vessantara giving away his family exemplifies extreme generosity. However, such acts can cause harm today and are not genuine kindness. True generosity should help others without hurting anyone.

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[28] Kuvera, & Tangyin, K. (2020). Understanding Mehm Tin Mon's interpretation of alobha (non-greed) and the practice of generosity. *Prajñā Vihāra: Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, *21*(2), 82–92.ProQuest p. 6

[29] Kuvera, & Tangyin, K. (2020). Understanding Mehm Tin Mon's interpretation of alobha (non-greed) and the practice of generosity. *Prajñā Vihāra: Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, *21*(2), 82–92.ProQuest

Chapter 3- Summary of the SUB Commentary Leading into the Heart of Diamond by Venerable Thich Huyen Chau

According to the principle of non-abidance, which the Buddha teaches from the beginning of the Sutra, “all forms are illusory, and the Bodhisattva should not let their mind be attached to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or thoughts.

To illustrate the insights above, the following essay will draw on the Sakya Buddha University's "Leading into the Heart of Diamond" by Venerable Thich Huyen Chau (SBU DS), which explores the dialogue between the Buddha and Subhuti as the Buddha guides practitioners on the liberation path.

A- First, we will introduce the Diamond Sutra and explore its name.

The Diamond Prajnaparamita is part of the Mahayana Canon and is only available in Sanskrit. Monks and scholars have created many translations across generations. The Taisho Tripitaka preserves seven Chinese translations. The most widely used version is from Kumarajiva, which is popularly translated and taught in Vietnam. Venerable Thich Huyen Chau uses the Chinese translation by Kumarajiva and other Chinese and Vietnamese translations for this book‘s references.

The Sanskrit title *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* may be translated roughly as the *“Vajra Cutter Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*.” Vajracchedika means “Diamond cut, " meaning it cuts through the wrong views that cause suffering.

Diamond is the true mind, the eternal intrinsic nature that cannot be destroyed, and is named Prajna wisdom. Even if one undergoes countless cycles of samsara, the true mind remains

unchanged; that mind is considered the diamond. The nature of the diamond cannot be obscured; it always shines, enlightens, and dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Prajna insights are the wisdom that recognizes the “Four Noble Truths,” which are suffering, the cause of suffering, Nirvana, and the path to achieve Nirvana. Prajna is the wisdom that sees through this world's illusory existence.

There are three elements to infiltrate Prajna:

1. Scriptural Prajna – utilizing language to analyze, study, and understand a Sutra.

2. Contemplative Prajna: Reflecting on the Buddha’s teaching to gain greater comprehension and deeper insight.

3. Ultimate Prajna—the realization of the truth. When one fully achieves the ultimate Prajna, it is called Prajna Paramita.

Paramita is a Sanskrit word often translated as "perfection" or "completeness." Paramita is associated with enlightened beings and is described in Buddhist commentaries as a noble character quality[30]. It is also a characteristic or goal of a bodhisattva who wants to become a Buddha. In Mahayana Buddhism, the six paramitas (six perfections) listed below are the foundation for self-cultivation on the bodhisattva path to Buddhahood.

1- Generosity, the willingness to give to others with selflessness and non-attachment.

2- Ethical discipline, proper conduct

[30] Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). *Pāramitā*. Wikipedia, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C4%81ramit%C4%81

3- Patience

4- Vigorous effort, diligence

5- Samadhi

6- Wisdom (Prajna)

B- Commentary of the Sutra Content

1- The Cause of the Dharma Assembly

The sutra starts with: Thus, I have heard: Once, the Buddha was in the city of Shravasti, in Jeta's Grove, with an assembly of 1250 monks. When it was near the hour for the meal, Buddha put on his robe, took his bowl, and headed toward the city of Shravasti. He went from house to house for alms, returned to the Vihara, took his meal, put away his robe and bowl, washed his feet, and sat down.

The above describes Buddha's daily routine. The Sakya Buddha University (SBU) commentaries discuss the six essential elements for completing a sutra, which are 1- Thus- signifies faith, 2- I have heard- represents text accomplishment, 3- Once- denotes time accomplishment, 4- the Buddha- indicates teacher accomplishment, 5- city of Shravasti- signifies place accomplishment, 6- gathering of 1250 monks represents assembly accomplishment. SBU commentaries note that the robe of the Sangha is also named "field of merit robes" where sentient beings can sow seed of merit, and the alms bowl is defined as "vessel of appropriate measure" which denotes a bhikkhu must choose the appropriate size matching his eating capacity, so there is no shortage, nor excess of food, symbolizing the character of non-accumulation of material. Buddha was born

with four significant elements, five aggregates, just like us. However, he realized no intrinsic self exists; all phenomena are interdependent, fleeting, and illusory, and he discovered the Path to Liberation. So, it is vain of us to attach to the illusion of continuous rebirth in the six realms.

2- Subhuti's Inquiry

Subhuti says that Buddha entrusts his disciples and monks with the greatest blessings and asks Buddha two questions: 1. If a good man or woman wants to achieve the highest Perfect Wisdom and attain Buddhahood, how should they stabilize their mind of cravings, and 2. How should they subdue their mind to desires? Buddha answers that he strongly supports sentient beings with a Mahayana Bodhisattva mind and will teach virtuous men and women how to abide and subdue their minds.

The two questions above are fundamental because Buddhists who uphold Dharma want to have a centered, balanced mind while on the path toward achieving the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. SBU Commentaries states, "Subduing the mind means conquering oneself." Buddha teaches that "conquering oneself is the greatest and most difficult victory", one of the most well-known quotes from *Dhammapada* (Verse 103). This is an internal struggle, and for the benefit of our survival, beings love themselves. Hence, it is difficult to fight against ourselves, eradicate our notion of self, and obliterate our desires when involved with conventional society. The questions of subduing the mind are immensely critical because how will we acquire samadhi when full of delusional thoughts? Subhuti's inquiry is not only the most essential topic that Buddha teaches throughout this entire sutra (SBU Commentaries), but it also represents the foundation of Buddhism since meditation is the core practice and practitioners need inner stability and a clear, non-ignorant mind to see the truth of all phenomena, a diamond-like unbreakable meditative absorption to achieve Enlightenment.

3- True Lineage of the Mahayana

The Buddha tells Subhuti that he will teach Bodhisattvas how to subdue their minds. All sentient beings, whether they are born from eggs, wombs, moisture, or by transformation which manifest instantly through a spontaneous, supernatural mode of birth, not through physical reproduction, born from karmic forces in hell or heavenly realms; whether they have form or formless; whether they have perception or without perception; or whether they are neither with nor without perception, Buddha will lead them all to Nirvana without residue, where they are liberated. Although countless, immeasurable sentient beings are liberated, in reality, not a single being is liberated because if Bodhisattvas hold onto notions of self, person, sentient being, or lifespan, then they are not true Bodhisattvas. (SBU Commentaries Leading into the Heart of Diamond (2023) Ven. Thich Huyen Chau)

Sentient Beings refer to all existences in the Universe. They manifest through causes, conditions, and interdependence, even with different classifications. They have no authentic inherent self and are, therefore, illusory. The notion of self gives rise to other concepts, including those of others, sentient beings, and lifespan, which involves discrimination; that is why the Buddha says that Bodhisattvas who still possess a self are not the true Bodhisattvas. This lesson emphasizes the giver's quality.

4- Wondrous practice of non-abidance

Buddha continues to say that Bodhisattvas should practice generosity without abiding in any dharmas, without attaching to form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas, so that the merits would be immeasurable as the space of the ten directions, if giving is without abiding.

Form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dharmas are the six sense objects, corresponding to the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The six sense objects create our perception and, hence, our subjective world. If likes and dislikes influence the mind, we are subject to delusive karma and rebirth. Do not attach to form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or dhammas, which means do not cling to self, phenomena, subjects, objects, mind, or external conditions. Nirvana is a state of liberation, in which there is no more suffering, desires, rebirth, or cessation, like a flame blowing out, extinguishing attachment, craving, and ignorance. To achieve Liberation, one should practice renunciation and transcend detachment, "giving without abidance to appearances, unmoving like Suchness"[31]. Buddha describes perfect giving as the highest of the six perfections (Paramitas). It is the giving with no attachment to self, phenomena, the six senses, the six-sense objects, no inner attachment, no outer attachment.

5- Seeing the truth by reason

Buddha asks Subhuti if he can see Tathagata through physical form, and the answer from Subhuti is no, because Buddha says form is not real form, just an illusion: "All forms are illusory. If one perceives all forms as not forms, then one sees the Tathagata."[32]

SBU DS states that the Diamond Sutra clearly distinguishes between the discriminative and non-discriminative minds that arise from the wisdom of Enlightenment. Understanding this distinction will help one know the sutra more easily and gradually eliminate afflictions and delusive thoughts. If one sees Tathagata through the thirty-two auspicious marks and eighty beautiful characteristics, that is form, and all forms are subject to impermanence and will perish. Tathagata refers to the Dharma-body of the Buddha, which naturally exists in every being, and to

[31] Venerable Thich Huyen Chau (2023). Leading into the heart of Diamond, p.194
[32] Venerable Thich Huyen Chau (2023). Leading into the heart of Diamond, p. 45

see it, one must see all forms as non-forms; form and appearance are just illusion, all arise and disappear due to conditions and causes, when conditions are present, forms exist, when conditions disperse, forms disintegrate. What is born will perish. Since arising and disappearing are in flux, forms are illusory. Therefore, all worldly forms are unreal.

6- Those who possess true faith are exceedingly rare

Subhuti asks Buddha if sentient beings who hear these words and sutra can develop faith, and Buddha replies that even five hundred years after the Tathagata's passing, those who observe precepts and cultivate merit will be able to build faith in the teachings intuitively and regard them as accurate. Such persons have long planted the seeds of virtue over many past lifetimes, with maybe hundreds of thousands of Buddhas and temples. Upholding precepts and accumulating merit are crucial in strengthening our faith and practice. Buddha says that anyone hears these teachings and develops pure faith even for just a moment, Tathagata sees and knows that such beings will attain immeasurable merit, because these beings are free from the arbitrary notions of the existence of the self, person, sentient being, and lifespan and are free from the reverse notions of non-existence. To explain these concepts, Buddha uses the metaphor of Dharmas as a raft that transports people to arrive (learning the notions of non-existence) at the other shore of Awakening. Once arriving, one should leave the raft behind once it serves its purpose. So, as one achieves Enlightenment, one should let go of Dharma and non-Dharma concepts. The passage describes the non-dual teachings that rise above the ideas of any fixed or non-fixed existences, that one must let go of the belief that there is or is not an I, of other fixed entities, or fixed lifespan. Otherwise, one’s thoughts will be confined.

7- No attainment, no teaching

“Buddha asks Subhuti, 'Did Tathagata attain the perfect enlightenment? Did Tathagata teach any dharma?”. Subhuti answers no because Buddha teaches there is no independence or an existing mind called supreme, perfect enlightenment. All sages are distinguished by their belief in the unconditioned dharma. Buddha talks about No Attainment and No Teaching because the truth in the teachings is inexpressible. Buddha and his disciples are not enlightened by a set method of teaching, but also by their natural, spontaneous inner process.

Buddha also introduces the concept that “What is called the Buddha Dharma is not the Buddha Dharma, but we call it Buddha Dharma.” The commentaries state that Buddha Dharma is a provisional name, not an ultimate reality, SBU Commentaries, p. 65. All giving, merits, and dharma concepts should be understood to guide practitioners toward liberation. To keep Buddhism alive, one must diligently cultivate the dharma by upholding, internalizing, practicing, and spreading it. The merit will be immeasurably more outstanding than giving material wealth.

8- All attainments arise from adhering to the faithful Dharma.

Buddha asks Subhuti If someone were to fill the entire trillions of galaxies with the seven treasures and offer them as a gift, would their merit be immense?" Subhuti answers yes, but that merit is not true merit because this type of merit corresponds proportionally to the amount of material wealth given and generosity biding in form. At the same time, Buddha teaches generosity without abiding in form. Tathagata speaks of it as immense merit, yet this merit has a limit so it would be less than that of someone who upholds and practices even four lines of this sutra and teaches them to others because all Buddhas arise from this sutra, just as a seed can grow into an enormous tree, the seed of giving the Dharma can grow into a gigantic tree of True Dharma, can liberate beings from samsara. Buddha teaches that one should not cling to the self,

being, others, and lifespan. The name is provisional, so what is called the Buddha Dharma is not the Buddha Dharma.

9- Buddha elaborates on "a form without form."

"Subhuti, can a stream-enterer think he has attained the fruit of stream-entered? Subhuti answers that he cannot because there is no entry and because it does not involve sense-based forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or dharmas. The same truth applies to a once-returner, a non-returner, and an Arhat. Otherwise, he is still clinging to the notions of self, person, being, and lifespan and conforming to the mundane world. From the insights of the Diamond Sutra, these given stages are designed to provide a temporary raft for someone who wishes to cross the river from the shore of the suffering of ignorance, Desire Realm, to the shore of equanimity, awakening, Enlightenment which means he has eradicated all afflictions and delusional views, liberated from all distortions and defilement; he leaves the raft behind.

10- Adornment of Pure Land

. Buddha said to Subhuti: "What do you think in the past when I was with Dipankara Buddha? Did I attain any Dharma?" Subhuti answers no because Dharma is also unreal and clings to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, thoughts, and phenomena, which are chained, unfruitful, and unliberated. Buddha asks about Bodhisattvas adorning the Buddha's land. Subhuti answers no because adornment in Buddha's land is not an adornment. Each Bodhisattva, upon attaining Buddhahood, establishes a realm to teach sentient beings according to their practices, called the Buddha realm or Buddha land.

Buddha also asks if a person with a large body like Mount Sumeru is large. Subhuti says it is a large body, but not a body, because it is merely a temporary formation of conditions. Through the

lenses of Prajna wisdom, recognize the dependent arising and illusory nature of all forms. Subhuti says no because Buddha's attainment does not belong to the perception of the mundane world and does not fit the description of the illusory world of ordinary beings. Buddha teaches to liberate all sentient beings, but no sentient beings are liberated because a Bodhisattva should not fall into the notion of self, others, sentient beings, or lifespan. Furthermore, according to the ultimate truth, all phenomena are illusory, so there are no faithful Dharma or sentient beings to attach to.

11- The supreme merit of non-attachment

Buddha asks Subhuti to think that the Ganges River has many grains of sand, imagines that each grain is another Ganges River, and considers how immense the number of grains of sand would be. Subhuti's answer is enormous. Buddha says that if one spreads and teaches even a single four line of the Diamond Sutra to others, the merit will surpass the offering of trillions of galaxies filled with seven treasures because the merit gained from the realm of conventional truth is limited are subject to dependent origination and impermanence, holding no lasting value and no truth. In contrast, the merit gained from upholding Dharmas is limitless and everlasting because it plants a seed of Great Dharma that will become a monument tree of Dharma, leading to ultimate Liberation.

12- Reverence for the true sutra

Buddha tells Subhuti that wherever the place, even a single four-line verse from the Diamond Sutra taught, such place is revered by all present; needless to say, upholding, studying, reciting the whole Sutra that such a person has accomplished the rarest, Great Supreme Dharma. Moreover, Buddha and his venerated disciples are considered present wherever the Diamond

Sutra is present because Prajna Paramita wisdom represents the cultivation of the core concept of Buddhism, the unchanging nature of all phenomena, no arising or ceasing, the eternal nature within us, which is the Buddha's nature. This is the highest perfect wisdom, which leads to the ultimate truth and Liberation, the elimination of afflictions, and the transcending of samsara; therefore, it is the most revered Sutra. However high regard this Sutra holds, one should uphold the Dharma as a path leading to the utmost goal but not cling to its existence since Buddha says that throughout the years, he did not teach anything, so the title Diamond Sutra is a conventional name that Buddha uses as a skillful means to introduce to sentient beings the highest wisdom, and the preaching Dharma is an illusory teaching of the Tathagata.

13- Upholding the Dharma

Subhuti asks the Buddha what the name of the Sutra is, and he replies that it is named Diamond Prajnaparamita, and that Subhuti should uphold it by this name. Buddha says, "Prajnaparamita is not truly Prajnaparamita, yet it is called Prajnaparamita." Diamond is a strong material that is difficult to break compared to other materials. In Sanskrit, vajra represents the ultimate truth and enlightenment, relying on this Sutra as a diamond blade, strongly cutting through the illusion and ignorance, to achieve the Perfect Supreme Wisdom. Prajna means wisdom, and paramita refers to transcending the self and boundaries. Buddha uses the same negation style to ask Subhuti if there is a place for Buddha to teach Dharma, and the answer is no, because through the Prajna Wisdom, the Dharma, the teacher, and the audience all lack inherent nature, so the place does not exist either. They are all illusory. Buddha uses the negation style to teach all sentient beings to dispel clinging to Prajna, or any existence, tiny particles as dust or enormous as the universe, or even his thirty-two auspicious marks, and to rise above discrimination, duality, and attachment to self, others, beings, and lifespan, using. All phenomena have a false reality because their

existence has no actual inherent being but only appears when ripened causes and conditions co-exist.

14. Transcending cessation

Subhuti was in tears when listening to Buddha's teaching and comprehending the profound meaning of this Sutra. He says to Buddha that he has never heard such an extraordinary teaching since attaining spiritual insight, that if someone listens and develops a pure faith, they will gain the highest and rarest insight into the truth. Subhuti tells the Honored One that Perfect Insight is not Perfect Insight; the Tathagata calls it Perfect Insight. When one upholds the Dharma ardently, one understands that Dharma is, as all phenomena are, unreal, so one does not cling to it as stated: perfect wisdom is not ideal. However, for conventional life, one calls it Perfect Wisdom for easy following of the guides. Awakening will arrive when one practices assiduously the Dharma but does not hold any expectation. This will give rise to an accurate nature view as delusion does not influence it. Similarly, one should not cling to Perfect Wisdom after attaining it. Subhuti says to Buddha that he understands and upholds the teaching of the Diamond Sutra without difficulty. Sentient beings in the future of 500 years who hear this Sutra, understand it, and have complete faith in it would attain awakening because they do not attach to the notion of self, other sentient beings, and lifespan.

These sentients are rare because they are characterized by non-abidance principles, not adhering to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, or dharma. Buddha agrees that it is rare for a person to hear this Sutra without being frightened. Buddha says that when the Tathagata speaks of the supreme paramita, it is not truly the supreme paramita. Thus, it is called the supreme paramita, because all illusory forms do not exist. However, Buddha calls it the Supreme paramita for sentient beings who walk on the path to Enlightenment to have a practice guide. Buddha calls

for transcendent patience and recounts his previous life as a sage, whom King Kaliga amputated. Buddha had no notion of self, other sentient beings, lifespan, practicing patience, or humility. Otherwise, he would harbor resentment and affliction, which prevented him from achieving liberation. Buddha teaches that a Bodhisattva should practice generosity for the benefit of all sentient beings without attachment to forms, without notions of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Buddha emphasizes the dependent–arising existence of sentient beings, reiterates that "All forms are illusory.", so "All sentient beings are not truly sentient beings." Buddha affirms that the Dharma he teaches is neither real nor unreal because, like all phenomena, Dharma is also illusory. Buddha wants sentient beings to transcend the discriminating mind and the notion of duality.

Buddha confirms with Subhuti that any virtuous men or women who uphold, recite, or study this sutra will perceive the Buddha's Wisdom and attain immeasurable and boundless merit.

Subhuti had already attained Arahant when listening to the Diamond Sutra. Considering how blessed we are, unlearned sentient beings have a chance to hear it. Buddha Wisdom is neither real nor unreal; it can see the true nature of all phenomena, a transcended mind free from attachment defilements, duality, and a clear and accurate perception of reality. This wisdom will last eternally, surpassing the benefit of bound and limited conventional intelligence. When one upholds this Sutra, practices non-abidance of any forms, any sensory objects, experiences the Dharma, consequently gaining the Prajna Wisdom, one realizes there is no self, that all is empty, so self, others, sentients, lifespan are also non-existent, unreal.

Even acquiring patience and humility is not acquiring patience and humility because, in practicing patience and humility, factors of the mind and forms are all illusory. Still, it is called acquiring patience and humility for conventional life to run smoothly.

15. The merit of upholding the Sutra

Buddha tells Subhuti that virtuous men and women who, in the morning, afternoon, evening, give away their lives numerous times as the grains of sand in the Ganges River, and continue to give their lives in such a way for countless hundreds of thousands of lifetimes, such merit is inconceivable. However, if someone listens to this Sutra with complete faith without contention, the merit of this latter will be far more outstanding. However, the greatest immeasurable merit is bestowed on someone who listens, writes, upholds, recites, and teaches others.

Buddha will see and recognize this person, who receives incalculable and boundless merit and virtue, aspires to the Great Vehicle, and attains the Supreme Enlightenment. Buddha states that a person satisfied with the Lesser Vehicle is still clinging to self, others, sentient beings, and lifespans. Therefore, they cannot fully understand this Sutra or explain it precisely.

When a person, with no fear, recites the Sutra, that person receives benefits and merit as self-gain. However, suppose they teach others to understand and practice, and guide sentient beings to engage on the path of Enlightenment. In that case, that person benefits others and embodies the practice of a Bodhisattva. That is why Buddha says such a person can follow the path of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment of the Tathagata.

Buddha tells Subhuti that wherever the Sutra is present, that place is considered sacred, where all sentient beings should revere it, make offerings, and regard it as a famous temple with countless formal ceremonies. This emphasizes the immense importance of this Sutra for its ability to guide sentient beings to attain Supreme Wisdom through the Greater Vehicle. Suppose one understands how short-lived life forms are, like the morning dew, the bubble, a passing cloud, a summer thunderstorm. In that case, the merit of donating a transitory body does not come close to the

greatness of merit of donating the everlasting liberation through spreading the Diamond Sutra, saving sentient beings from suffering and afflictions, and the chance of attaining Buddhahood. Buddha teaches this Sutra to people who follow the Mahayana path and ride on the Greater Vehicle to reach Supreme Wisdom.

16- The Purification of all Dharma

Buddha tells Subhuti that if some virtuous men or women accept and uphold this Sutra but are disparaged and insulted by others, it means that in their previous lives they had committed bad karma and now receive the suffering as a consequence. When all unwholesome karma is solved, they will attain Supreme Wisdom. Buddha recalls the time of Dipankara Buddha, countless ages ago, when he met and attained 84,000 nayutas of Buddhas without fail. However, if someone in the last epoch receives, studies, and practices this Sutra, the merit from this person will be a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand times greater than mine. Buddha wants to convey that the reward from this Sutra is inconceivable. When a person, while upholding the teaching of this Sutra, receives disparagement from others, Buddha says they undergo the karmic retribution, and the unimaginable merit generated by practicing the Diamond Sutra will balance out their negative karma, transform it into a lighter one, and shorten their suffering.

Sincere contribution and devotion are still finite, dependent co-arising, constrained in time and place. While practicing the Diamond Sutra, one acquires the mentality of no self, no arising, no ceasing. It is called the true mind, infinite, boundless wisdom. So, the karmic fruit from the worldly, time-bound, relative phenomena with limitless True Nature, the Ultimate Wisdom, is beyond comparison.

17- Ultimately, there is no self

Subhuti asks Buddha a previously discussed question about how a virtuous man or woman who wants to attain the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment should abide and subdue their mind. Buddha advice to such people a non-self-mentality that after liberating all sentient beings to the other shore, they have not liberated any sentient beings, because if they hold to the notions of self, other, sentient being, lifespan, they are still cling to conventional life, seeing phenomena as genuine, not heads to the correct path of liberation. Subhuti repeats the same discussion point from the beginning on how to abide and subdue the mind so the audience can grasp the Sutra's core meaning. Buddha teaches the present and also the future assembly that they want to help sentient beings without the thinking of helping them, cultivate the boundless and impartial compassion, through the view that “true form is no form”, recognized as “not a single being has been truly liberated”, eradicate the attachment from the givers, showing core characteristics of the Supreme Wisdom.

Buddha asks Subhuti whether the Tathagata ascended to a Dharma called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment from Dipankara Buddha, and Subhuti replies no.

Buddha’s words are “true words as they are, not deceitful words”. When Dipankara Buddha prophesied Shakyamuni Buddha's future enlightenment, the occurrence has shown itself in the future chronicle, not Dipankara’s prediction. Attaining Prajnaparamita is a realization of the emptiness of all, not acquiring an object. This is why Buddha says there is no attaining the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Otherwise, one still clings to oneself and considers phenomena, including the Supreme Dharma, as form, which is unreal and non-authentic. When one practices the Dharma to attain Buddhahood, metamorphosed as using the raft Dharma to reach the other shore (becoming Buddha), one should leave the raft behind as it becomes unnecessary and not

cling to illusive conditions or phenomena. In the previous chapter, Buddha teaches to let go of form, and in this chapter, Buddha advises surrendering the Dharma.

Tathagata means the Enlightenment one with no illusory thoughts, no discrimination of perceptions, no duality, only the presence of the actual reality, and an unchanging nature exists. Buddha says that if someone says that the Tathagata has attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, in truth, the Buddha had not achieved Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. The Supreme Perfect Enlightenment realized by the Buddha is neither real nor unreal, so Buddha declares that all Dharmas are Buddha dharma; they are not all Dharmas, thus they are called all Dharmas. Anything that renders peace and equanimity is called the Buddha Dharmas. Sakyamuni realized them and taught us. He did not invent them; the dharmas already inherently exist, omnipresent, and universal. The True Mind, free from all erroneous biases and delusions, transcending duality, shows that all Dharmas are Buddha dharma. This is why Buddha says all Dharmas are neither born nor destroyed, neither pure nor impure, neither increased nor decreased, neither real nor unreal.

Buddha asks Subhuti to consider the example of a large body. Subhuti says Buddha speaks of a large body. Buddha wants sentient beings to abandon clinging, large or small, the body is still Form, made up of impermanent aggregates, rise, or cease due to impermanent causes, illusory, empty of inherent characteristics. It is called a large body, a conventional term for easy adaptation to this world. The same argument applies to the Bodhisattva. Buddha teaches that all dharmas are void of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, so there is no benefit in attaching disciplines. If a Bodhisattva thinks he is a Bodhisattva, he is not a Bodhisattva. Buddha says that if a Bodhisattva thinks he must adorn the Buddha land, such a person would not be called a Bodhisattva because he still holds on to an object, to the notion of self. Dharma can be regarded

as the entire phenomena of the conventional world, where each phenomenon is considered distinct.

18- All thoughts are connected

Buddha asks Subhuti if Tathagata possesses the physical eye, the divine eye, the wisdom eye, the Dharma eye, and the Buddha eye. Subhuti answers yes to all five eyes above. The passage introduces five types of vision, each corresponding to different levels of awakening.

The physical eye of sentient beings is the naked eye, which can see under normal conditions, with adequate light, at a visible distance, and without obstructions; this is an ordinary sight.

The divine eye is the vision of the Gods of the Forms Realm, which can be attained through meditative practice and has supernatural clairvoyance. The sacred eye can see all forms, near or far, front or back, inside and outside, and is not limited to physical conditions such as distance or light.

The wisdom eye is the vision of those who have achieved the fruits of the Two Vehicles, which means that following the vehicle of the hearers or the path of the solitary Buddhas, they can see the ultimate reality, not just physical, but also their impermanent and interdependent nature. The wisdom eye combines ordinary vision with the insight gained through wisdom, allowing one to perceive the truth beyond illusion.

The Dharma eye is the vision of the Bodhisattva, achieved through the practice of Mahayana teachings and the aspiration to liberate all sentient beings. This eye enables one to see and understand all methods of Prajna cultivation.

The Buddha eye is the vision of a fully enlightened being, the Buddha. It is an omniscient awareness that encompasses all the capabilities of the previous four types of vision—physical, divine, wisdom, and Dharma eyes—while extending beyond any limitations. This means that there is nothing that the Buddha's eye cannot see or perceive.

The Buddha is concerned that beings with a lower spiritual level might fall into the erroneous belief in the annihilation of self and reality. This dialogue between the Buddha and Subhuti affirms the existence of phenomena within the realm of dualism. While the ultimate nature of all things is emptiness, within the realm of dualism, each phenomenon still exists and functions in its way. Thus, Subhuti responded affirmatively to each Buddha’s questions, acknowledging their existence.

The Buddha asks Subhuti about the grains of sand in the Ganges River—does the Buddha speak of them as sand? Subhuti replies, "Yes, Tathagata speaks of them as sand."

Buddha continues If there were as many Ganges Rivers as there are grains of sand in one Ganges River, and if there were as many Buddha realms as there are grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers, would there be many Buddha realms”? Subhuti says There would be very many.

The Buddha told Subhuti, “The Tathagata knows the minds of all sentient beings in all those realms. Because the Tathagata teaches that all these minds are not minds; thus, they are called minds. Why? Subhuti, that past mind cannot be grasped, the present mind cannot, and the future mind cannot.

The Buddha used the example of the grains of sand in the Ganges River to illustrate an immeasurable quantity. Each grain of sand represents a Buddha realm. Subhuti affirmed that when the Buddha speaks of the sand in the Ganges, it is indeed sand, indicating that the

discussion is within the realm of dualistic perception. Subhuti affirmed that the number of such Buddha realms is indeed vast.

Buddha made a profound statement to the assembly: “The Tathagata knows the thoughts of all sentient beings in all those realms. The number of Buddha realms is already innumerable, let alone all the sentient beings within those realms. Moreover, the thoughts of these beings are continuously arising and ceasing, changing from moment to moment, making it impossible to grasp their quantity. However, Buddha said that the Tathagata knows all these innumerable thoughts. This illustrates the interconnectedness between the minds of sentient beings and the Buddhas, as described in many Mahayana sutras. When a mind has attained perfect enlightenment, this knowledge naturally emerges.

Buddha explained, "The past mind cannot be grasped; the present mind cannot.” All the thoughts of sentient beings are in constant flux, arising and ceasing at every moment. These thoughts lack substance and a fixed nature, rendering them illusory and ungraspable. All past thoughts have passed and left no trace, making them impossible to grasp. Future thoughts have not yet arisen and are unknown, making them equally ungraspable. As for present thoughts, they slip into the past as soon as they arise, continuously changing and disappearing, making them ungraspable.

With clear and accurate perception, recognizing the illusory nature of all thoughts, an enlightenment being can perceive all arising thoughts of sentient beings throughout the entire dharma realm, regardless of the number of Buddha lands. Buddha emphasizes the transient, ever-changing nature of all thoughts, and Buddha can see them all.

19- Unobstructed dharma realm

Buddha asks Subhuti if someone donates seven treasures to fill trillions of the universe, would that act create colossal merit? Subhuti assures, yes. Buddha states that if such merit were truly substantial, Tathagata would not use the word “merit”, because merit is intrinsically empty. Giving treasures as much as they fill trillions of the universe, no matter how enormous it is, are still related to the relative perception in the conventional truth; therefore, they manifest a distorted view of phenomena when believing they are the actual existence. Buddha already explains that all principles are empty; they appear based on the interconnection of causes and conditions. Depending on the quantity and quality of co-arising supportive conditions, an auspicious or ominous phenomenon, the merit will appear tremendous, fantastic, or, to a lesser extent. When the giver transcended the clinging of self, other, sentient beings, lifespan, practices giving without attachment to forms, and understands the true nature of reality, Tathagata says that the merit is great. In Buddhism, both supportive and adverse conditions are considered beneficial because sentient beings use every condition to practice towards awakening.

20 - Transcending characteristics and forms

Buddha wants to emphasize the nature of emptiness and non-authentication in all phenomena and advises sentient beings to relinquish attachment. He uses the same paradoxical style and questions Subhuti if Tathagata can be seen through the perfection of his physical form and characteristics. Subhuti answers no with the same reasoning mentioned in the previous chapters: Tathagata cannot be seen through the perfection of his physical form or his characteristics, as they are not truly the perfections of Form. Thus, it is called the perfection of physical form or characteristics.

The perfect physical form and characteristics refer to the 32 significant marks and 80 minor marks of the Buddha’s body, representing boundless, infinite merit that the Buddha cultivated for

eons. All forms are illusory, unreal, temporary, and only exist through interdependent causes and conditions, so sentient beings were taught not to attach to Form. The laws of physics or the universe, Buddha's magnificent manifestation, will deteriorate with time. Each of us has different karma, so different living conditions and seeing render different perfection, which varies depending on the individual's merit at each time interval; this is why Perfect Appearances are not perfect appearances. However, people in conventional life use names to describe such marvelous appearances as perfect. Thus, they are called perfect appearances. All presentations are composed of impermanent aggregates, continuously in a dynamic state. Tathagata can be seen when one understands the True Nature of emptiness. Impermanence, interdependence of causes and conditions, detachment of clinging to self, sentient beings will see the Tathagata inherently within, Buddha Sakyamuni is not the Tathagata, he was physically born, so his body will cease to exist sometime, only his dharmakaya and the Buddha's nature will go on.

21- No Dharma to expound

Buddha tells Subhuti to refrain from thinking that Buddha would expound the Dharma; if someone says so, they are tarnishing the Buddha and do not understand Buddha's teaching. He explains that when the Tathagata speaks of expounding the Dharma, there is no Dharma to expound, thus it is called expounding the Dharma."

Buddha wants sentient beings to be fully detached from phenomena, so he teaches again, in the paradoxical style of previous chapters, that Dharma is a phenomenon that ceases to exist upon unfavorable, adverse causes and conditions. The result from the teaching and practice of the Dharma that each sentient being attains also depends on the level of their karma status.

Furthermore, words are words, named and labeled by conventional society, and do not represent the ultimate spiritual truth, the actual reality. To gain Perfect Wisdom, one must rise beyond words and practice to experience the truth directly. However, in this world, people need mentors to guide them toward enlightenment; thus, it is called expounding the Dharma.

Subhuti addresses to Buddha if sentient beings of the future, upon hearing this Sutra, will then have faith in it, Buddha replies that those sentient beings are neither living being nor not living being, what considered a sentient being, the Tathagata says, it is not truly a sentient being, thus is called a sentient being.

Ordinary people attached to their illusory forms perceive sentient beings as real, with an ego. However, forms or phenomena are unreal, empty of their fixed nature; they are mere names or mental concepts and have no actual, independent, or inherent existence. So, a sentient being is not truly a sentient being, but in this conventional world, such a label is used to navigate society; thus, they are referred to as sentient beings.

22- No attainment of the Dharma

Subhuti asks the Buddha if there is no attainment involved when he attains the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Buddha replies that in the realm of Supreme Perfect Enlightenment, there is no attainment of even the smallest dharma. This is why it is called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment.

When one still attaches to self, one thinks of attaining wisdom as the ultimate goal, which means regarding it as an object. All forms are non-existent and have no authentication. Enlightenment is not an object but a realization of the inherent True Nature, free from self and others, transcending duality. Therefore, there is no I, no self, to attain, no goal, no object to gain. It is called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment because it rises above all illusions of duality and sees things as they are.

Enlightenment is not acquiring but letting go of all attachments; then one can realize the essential, unchanging reality of things beyond concepts.

23- Virtuous deeds with a pure mind

Buddha tells Subhuti that Dharma is unvaried, neither high nor low; it is called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. By practicing the virtuous dharmas independent of any presumptuous concepts of self, others, sentient beings, lifespan, one attains Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Buddha says the virtuous dharma, but the Tathagata says they are not truly virtuous dharma; thus, they are called virtuous dharma.

Buddha explains that true dharma is equal and analogous because it lacks discrimination, distinctions, and dualities. It is called Supreme Perfect Enlightenment because it transcends comparison and separation. Buddha teaches sentient beings to practice the virtuous dharma without clinging to oneness. The self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan are all names constructed by a worldly mindset. Genuine compassion and Perfect Wisdom will be unveiled when generosity is a selfless action with no concept of giver or doer involved.

The Tathagata says virtuous dharma is not truly virtuous because dharma is a phenomenon (generosity, offerings, upholding dharmas…), and its characteristics are empty and non-authentic. If one clings to virtuous dharma, one is trapped in things, in Form. However, the conventional world names it virtuous dharma because beings need those teachings and guidance to see the True Reality of things. Supreme Enlightenment is the realization of emptiness and no independence in all principles.

24- Incomparable merit

Buddha says to Subhuti that if a person gives away the seven treasures in quantities as vast as billions of Mount Sumeru to another, the merit is incomparable to accruing the inconceivable merit of someone who upholds and practices the Prajnaparamita Sutra and teaches others even a single four-line verse.

It is a gigantic offering given the treasures that filled billions of Mount Sumeru. However, this is a quantitative material generosity, with limits and boundary conditions. No matter how enormous it is, it is subject to conditions, cease, and depletion. Teaching another, being the Prajnaparamita, the Perfection of Wisdom, the essence of emptiness and non-self, and even only a four-line verse, the merit is inconceivably superior to the previous donation. Material offerings are finite, have relative merit as creating good karma, still operate within the realms of Desires and Forms, and are still trapped in Samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth, experiencing sufferings and afflictions. In contrast, the merit from offering wisdom is non-quantified and inconceivable; it teaches people to see the root of suffering, liberates people from Samsara, and ends the cause of suffering. Giving treasures as helping someone for a time, while teaching one four-line verse of the Diamond Sutra as helping someone awaken, results in life. The merit from the latter is beyond all comparison.

25- Teaching with no place to teach

Buddha tells Subhuti not to think that Buddha has the idea to liberate sentient beings; in truth, there are no sentient beings whom the Tathagata liberates. If one says Tathagata liberates sentient beings, it implies that Tathagata still holds to self, person, sentient being, and lifespan. When the Tathagata calls a self, it is not what ordinary people think of as a self; when the Tathagata says ordinary people, they are not truly ordinary people. When Buddha says not to believe that he has the idea of liberating sentient beings, because he does not hold to self as a

liberator and to being an object. When Buddha mentions self, it is not the ordinary self that ordinary people think of, because from the core of Prajnaparamita, all things are empty of the inferential self, composed of flux aggregates, that rise or cease due to conditions.

Clinging to the wrong idea of the authentic self is an illusion that causes suffering. One should eliminate deluded perception to eliminate attachments, and when one experiences a clear mind, one will see the True reality of all things. Buddha does not liberate sentient beings; he shows people how to free themselves from being constrained by illusions that bring suffering.

26- Dharma body has no form

Buddha asks Subhuti Can a person see Tathagata by the thirty-two marks, Subhuti answers Yes, it is possible. Buddha continues that that is true, and then Chakravartin, the wheel–turning Sage King with thirty-two marks, can be recognized as Tathagata. Subhuti corrects his answer that one should not contemplate Tathagata by the means of the thirty-two marks. Buddha reiterates that if someone sees him in form, or seeks him in sound, they are on a mistaken path and cannot see the Tathagata.

In conventional thinking, Subhuti says that one can see Buddha through his physical presentation. This answer shows an attachment to appearances. When one considers the Buddha through the outer signs, they see the spiritual illusion of the Buddha's body, which will be ruined, and not his eternal Dharmakaya. The Wheel-Turning Sage King also has the auspicious thirty-two mark but is not enlightened. Buddha emphasizes that appearances are not an indication of enlightenment. Subhuti corrects his answer that one cannot perceive Tathagata, or the truth, through indications. Buddha says one cannot look for Buddha through Form or Sound because Buddha is beyond form and sound, as the Tathagata is not limited by body or external

manifestations. Tathagata is the realization of the core of Prajnaparamita, which is emptiness, non-self, and wisdom. Tathagata is not a person; it is the Enlightenment itself.

27- No cessation, no extinction

Buddha tells Subhuti not to think that he attains Supreme Perfect Enlightenment without possessing those auspicious marks, but also not to believe that Buddha depends on those marks to attain the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment. Subhuti should not think that people who obtain the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment will feel that all dharmas will cease. That is not what Buddha says.

The auspicious signs resulted from the merits of countless lifetimes of cultivation, practicing virtuous dharmas, and benefiting innumerable sentient beings. They are not the marks that occur naturally, or ones that one randomly acquires. If one says that achieving the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment without the appearance of these marks, one denies the unthinkable merit resulting from upholding this dharma. The thirty-two marks will appear when one becomes a Buddha. Buddha teaches that all forms are illusory, arising from temporary conditions, rising or ceasing based on these conditions, without any permanent inherent nature. Enlightenment does not depend on how Buddha looks, nor is it defined by the presence or absence of these marks. The views above are attachments, and enlightenment is empty of all forms, possessing or not possessing.

28- No accumulation, no desire

Buddha says to Subhuti as a Bodhisattva gives away seven treasures equal to the number of sands of the Ganges River compared with another one who understands the non-self-nature of all phenomena, the latter would receive greater merit because the second Boddhisattva do not see

blessing and merit as a private gain, therefore there is no accumulation of good, no reinforcing the illusion of a self that gains something., that he is a doer or giver practically empty of authentication, no arising nor ceasing, manifests by temporary condition. Instead, he attains wisdom and perceives the true nature of all phenomena. Enlightenment is to let go of all attachments, good or bad. A Bodhisattva offers generosity with great compassion and a clear mind, and is unattached, like a flower blooming not to be praised, but blooming because it is its nature.

29- Tranquil Grace

Buddha says to Subhuti that if someone says that the Tathagata comes or goes, sits or lies down, that person does not truly understand my teaching. Tathagata neither comes from anywhere nor goes anywhere. Thus, it is called the Tathagata."

When one says the Tathagata comes or goes, they refer to the physical form of the Tathagata, misunderstanding that there is a fixed self moving around. Buddha speaks of the unborn and undying Dharmakaya, transcending the concepts of coming and going within space and time. Tathagata means the one who has come from suchness, has gone into suchness, which is the formless, non-dual, unconditioned reality. Therefore, Tathagata is not constrained by time, space, or identity. Buddha teaches that all dharmas are empty of inherent existence, so no person is coming or going, no places to come from or to leave, no time passage. Tathagata is beyond duality and mental concepts.

30- Neither formed nor dispersed

Buddha says to Subhuti that if someone grinds billions of the universe into the tiniest particles, would that be numerous? Subhuti answers innumerable questions, but if these particles truly

existed, Buddha would not refer to them as the smallest particles because what Buddha calls the tiniest particles are not truly the tiniest particles; thus, they are called the tiniest particles.

Grinding billions of the universe into the tiniest particles is beyond imagination and calculation from the perspective of conventional truth. However, from the ultimate truth, the countless numbers of these particles do not truly exist because they have no fixed independent nature made of other things, such as molecules, atoms, electrons, protons, and space. These components are consistently mobile, even on the external; these particles look solid and fixed.

These particles are labeled and named as valuable tools in the conventional world. Thus, they are called the tiniest particles. Subhuti says that when the Tathagata speaks of the billions of the universe, they are not truly the world. Thus, they are called worlds. Subhuti repeats the same reasoning paradox that Buddha speaks of: if the worlds truly exist, they would be a composite phenomenon; thus, it is called a composite phenomenon, ultimately inexpressible, yet an ordinary being attached to such a phenomenon. A composite phenomenon is something that is fabricated from the combination of other elements. Buddha reiterates numerous times that all forms have no independent fixed nature. They exist due to the temporary rise and cessation of many causes and conditions. Like the example of the worlds, they manifest from the myriads of large forms, from the planets to the tiniest particles; they are non-existent, constantly changing, forming and dissolving, depending on the transitory interdependence of other causes and conditions, therefore empty. Human beings' view is trapped with identity, cravings, ignorance, believing the illusory phenomenon as real, and creates the endless suffering cycles of rebirths.

31- Not giving rise to view

Buddha asks Subhuti whether a person understands the actual meaning when he speaks about self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Subhuti answers no, saying that when Buddha speaks of the views of self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan, these are not truly self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan. Thus, they are called self, others, sentient beings, and lifespan.

At the beginning of this Sutra, Buddha already speaks about self, others, sentient beings, lifespan, and states that a Bodhisattva who clings to self, others, sentient beings, lifespan is not a true Bodhisattva. Buddha explains that when ordinary people believe in self, they think there is a real I-ego with a fixed nature that exists; believe in others means clinging to a separate, self-standing individual; believe in sentient beings means considering living beings exist independently; believe in lifespan means there is a soul that continues with time. Buddha says these views are delusive because no permanent, independent phenomenon exists, “they do not truly exist”. However, ordinary people regard them as real, label and name them, so Buddha uses them as a skillful means, as language to guide people's understanding about the True Reality, thus it is called self, others, sentient being, lifespan.

Buddha says to Subhuti that one who aspires to the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment must understand, perceive, and have faith in Dharma as it is, without fostering attributes to the Dharma. When Tathagata speaks of the attributes of Dharmas, they are not truly attributes of Dharmas. Thus, they are called attributes of Dharmas.

When Buddha says one must understand the dharma as it is, one perceives the phenomenon as its true nature, not misled by biases, habits, emotions, and no additional judgements. One must see phenomena as they are, not as one imagines what they should be; all phenomena are dependent, arising, and transient, without inherent self-nature, “seeing as it is”. Even though phenomena are

unreal in the ultimate truth, they exist in sentient beings' relative perception with distortion from the attributes. Hence, Buddha uses the world provisional language for sentient beings, to have the ease of operating in this conventional world while heading towards awakening, "they are not truly attributes of dharma, thus they are called attributes of dharma." Buddha wants people to abandon all attachments, positive or negative saying attributes are not attributes, or even Supreme Perfection Wisdom is not Supreme Perfection Wisdom.

32- All phenomena are illusory

Buddha speaks to Subhuti that if a person fills the incalculable worlds with the seven treasures and gives them away. Another aspires to attain the Bodhi mind, upholds, practices this Sutra, and teaches others a single four-line verse; the latter's merit surpasses the former. Giving material wealth, no matter how large it is, generates a finite merit that propagates in the three realms, not setting them free of Samsara, while offering Dharma, cultivating wisdom, awakening people's minds to liberation, ending the cycle of rebirths, ending suffering. Materials wealth helps in this life, while Dharma helps beyond life. Buddha says that when one teaches, one is not attached to forms, remaining abiding in suchness and stillness. Buddha advises the one who teaches not only verbally but also must personally practice and profoundly experience the quintessence of the Diamond Sutra. His presence is regarded as a wordless Dharma sermon. When not attached to forms, one does not cling to words of the teaching, of the self as a teacher, not chasing after the sensory objects that arise from the five aggregates as feeling good, they are all phenomena, therefore inherently empty. When one has a mind undisturbed from the external sensory objects, consequently clear, calm, reflective, perceiving all phenomena as they are, one has the mind that resides in suchness. Attaching to Form only leads to suffering in the cycle of rebirths. Buddha

illustrates the fragile, transient, non-authentication of all conditioned phenomena; Buddha states that all conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, like morning dew or a flash of lightning, and advises beings to contemplate. Is it worth the suffering of chasing after such an evanescent phantom? Buddha chose to be born in the Samsara to show how to end suffering for the good of all sentient beings. By the famous beautiful jewel verses above, Buddha concludes the Diamond Sutra.

Chapter 4 – Diamond Sutra in conversation with scientists

4.1- Your brain: Perception, Deception. NOVA – PBS Season 50, Episode 9, aired on May 17, 2023.

Vision Illusion- The Blue Dress

According to NOVA, "our brain is the most complex object we know in the universe. The brain has more connections than the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy."[33] As we see the world through our eyes, ears, and other senses, we might think the reality outside is what we are perceiving, but at the very first moment, we are transforming reality; it is all an illusion. The well-known example of the blue dress caused a polarizing debate, which will be discussed below. Susana Martinez-Conde (2023) says that your sense of who you are is an illusion, as is everything else. Heather Berlin (2023), a co-host, became a neuroscientist and psychologist to understand this subject. She explains that all brains contain neurons; they translate input from the external world, whatever we see, feel, or perceive. When neurons process sensory signals, they create an edited version of reality even on the most basic level. One of the hosts, Kasthuri (2023), added that we

[33] Bicks, M. (Writer, Director, & Producer), & Berlin, H. (Host). (2023, May 17). *Your brain: Perception deception* [TV series episode]. In *NOVA*. GBH. https://www.pbs.org/video/your-brain-perception-deception-0mqxyc/

are transforming reality into something we could use. Berlin says that neurons transform reality by competing and depend on the signal strength; the strongest will go to the brain, and the weaker ones will be stamped out.

Berlin and their partners give an example of Adelson's checkerboard illusion. Some of the squares are darker than others, but are all the same shade. This happens because our brain is adjusting to the shadow. The brain considers the light source and subtracts that light source from our resulting interpretation to arrive at a perception. Stephen Macknik (2023) joins in; we cannot see most of the world around us; we are blind to 99% of the world around us at any given time. There is only one place where we can see 20/20 vision, and everywhere else, we are legally blind. Berlin (2023) explains that we see only one percent of our visual field because the retina can only process a tiny portion of the world in detail. We have high-quality image processing wherever we look, and our surroundings are blurry. If we did not have eye movement and wanted to see the world in high quality, our brain would have to be 600 times bigger. Our eyes sample tiny pieces of the world, and the brain fills in the rest, constantly, all the time. So, we see what our brain creates, not the whole truth.

With the dress example, is it blue and black or white and gold?

Belin (2023) says we live in a simulation most of the time. When she first looked at the dress, she thought it was blue and black. However, in the morning, when she looked at it through the phone, she saw it was white and gold. The explanation is that the lady wears the dress, her skin is tinted blue because the background light has a blue cast on her. So, our brain adjusts, ignores some blue light, and renders the vision of white and gold. On the other hand, if her skin is tinted yellow, with a background that has a yellow cast, she stands in the light, our brain does not need to adjust, so the dress appears as if it is blue and black. What enters our eyes is not color. Color is

an interpretation of our brain. Light shines on the world and bounces off objects, coming in as different wavelengths than their color. Those wavelengths change when they hit rough, smooth, or wet surfaces. The signals that get into our eyes are a product of the reflective properties of the object and the wavelength of light.

Auditory illusions - Yanny or Laurel

The brain creates our world not only through vision, but also through the auditory. We hear what we want to hear, and the brain will jump to the best fit. We are locked in our version of reality. If we pay more attention to low frequencies, we will hear “Laurel”; if we pay more attention to high frequencies, we will hear “Yanny”. Needless to discuss the profound Buddhist doctrine of Emptiness and Interconnectedness, only the simple signals of vision and auditory already lead us to live in an illusion, in a simulation our brain creates.

4.2- The Strangest Idea in Science: Quantum Immortality by Cool Worlds.

This video suggests that, based on quantum mechanics, one can never truly die, a phenomenon called Quantum Immortality. Hugh Everett III proposed this theory in 1950, introducing the Many-Worlds Interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics. The well-known Double Slit Experiment is done by shooting one electron at a time against a wall with two small holes, and the data shows interference patterns on the other side. A single electron acts as a wave travel through both slits all at once, producing interference patterns. Left alone, the particles do not have definitive positions or velocities; they are everywhere and nowhere all at once, as described by the superposition theory.

However, if one puts a detector on one of those holes to allow tracking which hole it went through, the interference pattern disappears, and the patterns become two strikes left on the wall. Instead of acting as a wave, now they are acting as particles.

This simple experiment results in a profound revelation, uprooting our common-sense intuition that the universe is not what it seems. The experiment means the quantum level is not fixed; observation changes the outcome. Quantum superposition describes the phenomenon where a quantum can exist in multiple states simultaneously, until a measurement is made.

There are parallels between quantum superposition and Buddhist concepts of emptiness and dependent arising. Quantum physics suggests that reality is a complex web of interconnected probabilities rather than fixed certainties, just as Buddhism of interconnectedness, with immeasurable causes and conditions.

These ideas that quantum entities, like particles, might exist in multiple dimensions, like how a person might experience multiple realities, are related to the Many-Worlds Interpretation (MWI) of quantum mechanics. MWI proposes that the universe branches out into various possibilities when a quantum event occurs.

This concept is sometimes compared to a person existing in multiple dimensions or realities. In this analogy, a person might have copies of themselves, each experiencing a different branch of the multiverse.[34] MWI is a well-known interpretation; other theories also explore the concept of multi-dimensionality in quantum mechanics, like superstring theory, which proposes that there are more than three spatial dimensions, and that these extra dimensions might be relevant to the multi-state character of quantum phenomena. Research in Quantum Entanglement theory states

[34] Gribbin, J. (2020, May 20). *The many-worlds theory, explained*. The MIT Press Reader. https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/the-many-worlds-theory/

that two particles are linked and communicate with one another no matter how far apart they are. With quantum, there are endless parallel universes for one possible outcome; you die in one world, survive in another. From one's point of view, one only experiences the world in which one survives, which is why it is called quantum immortality.

When I was younger, hearing about Buddha appearing in multiple worlds simultaneously to teach the dharma did not convince me. Still, I accept it as faith with reserve, just as Christians believe God created the whole universe in six days.

As science develops and the discovery of quantum helps resolve my skepticism, I am firmly convinced that Buddha is omniscient and has such an inconceivable clairvoyance.

4.3- Donald Hoffman. Reality is an illusion - How evolution hid the truth - Lex Fridman podcast #293

Donald Hoffman, professor of cognitive science at UCI, focuses his research on evolutionary psychology, visual perception, and consciousness. He has a PhD from MIT and has authored over 120 scientific papers on these topics.

Hoffman says, "Whatever reality is, it is not what you see. What you see is just an adaptive fiction."[35]

Hoffman claims that the world we see with our eyes is not real, not even an abstraction of objective reality. It is entirely detached from objective reality. He explains that natural selection

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Fridman, L. (Host). (2022, June 12). *Donald Hoffman: Reality is an illusion – How evolution hid the truth* (No. 293) [Audio podcast episode]. In the *Lex Fridman Podcast*. https://lexfridman.com/donald-hoffman/

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would shape our sensory system so that we see what we need to see to survive long enough to reproduce.[36]

From the origin of life on Earth to humans, the evolution process does not maximize for truth; it maximizes fitness, which may not connect to the truth. He states that the probability that human consciousness evolves to see the truth of reality is almost zero; instead, it aims to increase its ability to survive in the environment.[37]

Hoffman says, "underneath it all, there are atoms functioning and with the many Nobel prize research for particles and fields, built on perceptions through our eyes and senses. Hoffman says, "it is a real experience, a real adaptive set of perceptions."[38]

Evolution gave us perceptions that guide adaptive behaviors, and part of that process, it turns out, means hiding the truth and giving your eye candy.[39]

He provides the example of using the computer interface to write an email, utterly detached from the zeros and ones firing inside the computer.[40]

Hoffman says that we used to assume that space and time were fundamental for several centuries, and it has been beneficial." However, with science developing, new mathematical structures beyond Einstein's four-dimensional space-time have emerged."[41]

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Our world is three-dimensional, and time progresses, so three dimensions plus one is four. Einstein and quantum theory work when spacetime is below 10^{-33} centimeters or 10^{-43} seconds. Beyond that, spacetime is no longer operational.[42]

Hoffman says that when the research on scattering amplitudes goes beyond spacetime, you do not have the notion of unitarity or locality. The result captures some asymmetries that are true to the data in the geometry of the facets called polytopes or polyhedra.

This is precisely why Buddha says what we see is unreal; the truth is beyond all concepts (no unitarity or locality). Because our senses are built for a three-dimensional view, we cannot see beyond appearances, which are illusions. Hoffman says he is working on the theory "Timelessness dynamics of consciousness. "[43] Which reminds one that consciousness is continuously flowing, persisting through death and rebirth, and carrying karmic seeds from one life to the next.

4.4- In the Convergence of Science and Spirituality (part one) – Donald Hoffman and Rupert Spira YouTube.

Hoffman argues that evolution favors perceptions that enhance fitness, not those that accurately reflect reality. Therefore, it was hidden. Spira says it is impossible to define Ultimate Reality in terms of everything we perceive. Hoffman agrees that ultimate consciousness transcends any mathematics one can put out because science will progress, the subsequent mathematical model discovery will supersede, and any description would be an incomplete theorem.

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Hoffman says traditional physicists think consciousness arises from physical objects such as the brain and neurons. Once the system is complex enough, this complexity will generate consciousness, awareness, thoughts, emotions, sensations framed within a physicalist framework, and everything happens within space-time.

Hoffman disagrees with this assumption, saying nothing can be perceived without consciousness. To Hoffman, consciousness is fundamental, and the space-time model, Einstein's fourth dimension, and quantum theory are no longer applicable. He gives the example of DNA structure, and once it was figured out, certain mysteries of life unraveled. He will do the same with consciousness, saying that consciousness will unravel once we understand the neural circuitry.

Hoffman states that space-time, being the fundamental reality, has worked for centuries. Still, a few years ago, the Nobel Prize was given to three physicists who have experimental confirmation proving local realism is false, when saying that physical objects do not have real value in their properties when they are not observed, example as quantum, when leaving alone, it takes wave form, no specific location. Still, it converts to two stripes (definite location) when observed.

Spira says that scientists use the faculties of the mind as perception. Thoughts cannot see the real nature because our minds limit everything. In other words, the mind looks at reality, but reality appears to that mind by its limitations. Just as one looks at the snow through an orange-tinted glass, the snow will look orange. It is the wrong tool, using our conceiving and perceiving faculties to look for the ultimate real, just as a screen on which movies are generated.

Hoffman says that 99 percent of his colleagues still have the physicalist outlook, that we are in a slow social institution to change its view, and that the new theories overwhelm our biases.[44], giving the example that by 1905, Newton's theory was no longer fundamental when Einstein's theory emerged. It took 17 years for Einstein to receive the Nobel Prize in physics. The Nobel Committee was clear that Einstein's space-time theory did not overthrow Newton's; it was the quantum theory, but it took the Committee a long time to respect and believe in it.

Hoffman implies that once the theory that consciousness is fundamental develops further with more data, physicists will gradually change their minds about consciousness being a byproduct of physical processes and consider it beyond conventional concepts. Physicist Neymar Connie, Hamed, and others are finding a new structure beyond space-time that exists, so eventually, there will be new technology that does not require the existence of matter to work.[45]

Hoffman credits physicist David Gross's announcement during the Einstein achievement celebration 2005. He explains that to measure something very tiny, like the exact position of an electron, we need light with shorter wavelengths. Here, quantum physics steps in, as we use light with shorter and shorter wavelengths, the energy of the light goes up, focusing more energy on a tiny space. With his famous equation $E = mc^2$, Einstein says that energy and mass are the same

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[44] Spira, R. (Host). (2024, July 31). *Ep. 245: The convergence of science and spirituality (Part One) – Donald Hoffman & Rupert Spira* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Rupert Spira Podcast*. Spreaker. https://www.spreaker.com/episode/ep-245-the-convergence-of-science-and-spirituality-part-one-donald-hoffman-rupert-spira-rupert-spira--6069250600

[45] 00:22:24

thing. Packing much energy into this tiny space means we pack much mass. When so much mass energy is crammed into a small space, it collapses into a black hole, and we destroy the space.

The limit here, called the Planck scale, is around 10^{-33} centimeters in size or 10^{-43} seconds in time. At this scale, physicist David Gross says, space and time lose meaning; we cannot measure space or time below that limit; it does not make sense anymore. This experiment proves that space and time are not truly fundamental. They break down at the tiny scale. So, space and time are like approximations or structures that work at larger scales, but not the deepest level of reality. Since space and time are no longer valid frameworks, quantum mechanics is also no longer applicable.

Physicists Nima Arkani-Hamed and others work on a theory beyond space-time and quantum theory. They find structures named Deep Structures that do not assume space and time, do not have Hilbert spaces, and have no mathematical structure of quantum theory. If we think of 2D or 3D space, we use x and y to represent their coordinates. Hilbert space extends this concept to an infinite number of dimensions. With the Large Hadron Collider, they found the structure of the amplituhedron in 2014. Researchers can simplify complex calculations by using the geometric properties of this structure. Hoffman gives the example that if we use Quantum field and space-time techniques, it will take hundreds of pages of algebra to compute just one interaction, so when dealing with hundreds of thousands of these interactions per second, a supercomputer cannot keep up with it. By hand using the new structure, we can calculate the computation in two or three terms, so now there is a race working on the model.

Hoffman says that consciousness, with its numerous conscious agents for its experience, has a mathematical theorem that says it will never be able to describe the ultimate. Infinity is not one thing; there are different sizes of infinity. Gregor Cantor discovered in the 19th century that

numbers counting from one to infinity form the smallest infinity. The subset of the integers, like one, two, and three,… fifty thousand, is called the power set and is a much bigger infinite set. So, he says, if we apply his theorem about consciousness, we will have an infinite number of infinities of conscious agents, innumerable localized points of view of infinite consciousness within infinite consciousness. For every human being, we have a separate consciousness with infinite local temporary illusory localization.

Rupert Spira explains that each of us has a separate, personal mind, and all our experiences (all conscious agents), yet they all arise from the same underlying source: infinite consciousness. Countless individual minds might be just localizations or perspectives within one indivisible field of consciousness. There is no reason to think there is a limit to how many local points of view can appear; there could be an infinite number, but the consciousness that each of these local minds arises within is still the same. Spira says we may see many people from different locations, each with their own perspective. Our mind is not splitting into many minds; our mind remains one, happening within one single dreaming mind. At the deeper point, infinite consciousness, the ultimate awareness, never divides itself. It remains whole, undivided, outside of space and time. From the point of infinite consciousness, there is no space to move through, and no time to pass; there is only itself. Is not this explanation that Buddha describes Nirvana?

Spira states that no one ever finds what matter is. We extrapolate the existence of a physical substance called matter that exists independently of consciousness; no one has ever seen such a solid substance, let alone how consciousness is generated from it. We find what appears as a matter when we look at a reality through our perceiving and conceiving faculties, we give it the name Matter, in the way reality seems to a finite mind constructed, in the way the human mind is built. Many other Minds may look at the same reality that we look at, because there is only one

Reality, but it may appear to them differently than what we see, because their minds are configured differently than our human minds. So, matter, the physical universe, is just the way one reality made of a consciousness appears to, from the localized finite perspective of a human mind, so matter is part of the way reality appears, not what reality is, not what reality is ultimate. If we go deeper, we find appearances in consciousness instead. He suggests that the infinite consciousness lies way beyond each of our finite minds, precedes our finite minds, so if we see the pen, "the true reality of the pen is infinite consciousness, but the way the pen looks, its shape, color, form come from our individual, limited minds. Our minds sort of filter that reality and give it form. This is what poet William Wordsworth meant when he said we "half create, half perceive" the world. Yes, there is something real out there that exists independently of us. However, we also create the world because our mind shapes how reality appears.

This idea challenges materialism, the belief that only physical matter is fundamental. If space, time, and objects like pens depend on the mind to appear the way they do, then consciousness may be more essential than matter.

Hoffman agrees with Spira about the explanation above and says that his goal is to make what Spira says mathematically precise.[46].

4.5- The intersectionality between Buddhism, Consciousness, and quantum physics- David Leong

David Leong, in his article "The Intersectionality between Buddhism, consciousness and quantum physics," upheld the Buddha's interpretation of consciousness and self-reality. The

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[46] Spira, R. (Host). (2024, July 31). *Ep. 245: The convergence of science and spirituality (Part One) – Donald Hoffman & Rupert Spira* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Rupert Spira Podcast*. Speaker. https://www.spreaker.com/episode/ep-245-the-convergence-of-science-and-spirituality-part-one-donald-hoffman-rupert-spira-rupert-spira--60692506 time 00:28:52

words “quantum science and Buddhism converge towards a shared understanding of reality, albeit interpreted differently.”[47] Quantum science is grounded in empirical evidence; Buddhism relies on introspective practices to decipher the existence of nature”. He points out that quantum physics is a paradoxical understanding of the nature of reality that transcends deterministic worldviews. The quantum concept of superposition and the role of the observer determine the state of quantum systems. He states that the Copenhagen Interpretation suggests that atoms are not “things” but are “observable phenomena.” It places the human mind and perception amid what we call “matter” and objective reality. (Ricard & Thuan, 2009, p.79)

Similarly, Buddhism offers an insightful perspective on the nature of consciousness and the illusory construct of the self. It posits that the reality experienced by the human mind is an interpretation of the mind itself, not an absolute, independent entity.

Quantum science uses experiments and evidence, while Buddhism uses deep self-reflection to understand existence. In quantum physics, reality is not as fixed or predictable. Things can exist in many possible states until they are observed. Buddhism teaches that what we see and experience is not the true nature but is shaped by our minds. This idea connects with the quantum concept that the observer plays a key role in shaping what is real.

4.6- On The Nature of Consciousness- Daniel Coates

Daniel Coates writes, “In neuroscience, as explained by Richard J. Davidson, many researchers believe that veridical perception, being able to sense matter 'as it is' in a way that is not wholly distorted by constructs of mind, culture, and language, is impossible.”[48] All manifestations of

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[47] Leong, D. (2023, August 5). *The intersectionality between Buddhism, consciousness, and quantum physics*. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4532062

[48] **Coates, D.** (2016). *On the nature of consciousness*. Miyazaki University Faculty of Education Bulletin, Humanities, (87), 1–30. http://hdl.handle.net/10458/5919

consciousness are viewed as fabricated distortions of the conditioned brain. Modern physics shows that the mind and physical matter are connected today. So, it is not impossible that Buddhism has long been considered "a science of the mind." Physicist Max Planck, the founder of quantum theory, said, "I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we believe exists, postulates consciousness.

4.7- Buddhist contributions to physics, biology, and psychology- Robert Thurman

Robert Thurman says that Buddha's Enlightenment was a spiritual and scientific discovery. Through powerful deep meditation, Buddha sees the nature of reality. There is a debate about whether matter or consciousness is fundamental to the nature of reality. Traditional science claims that matter comes first, but quantum physics proves the opposite. We mistakenly think there is a fixed, separate self, but everything changes constantly, rises, and ceases, depending on temporal causes and conditions. Buddha calls this phenomenon "emptiness," meaning there is no authentic fixed self, even to the atoms or the mind. Thurman says Buddhist insights complement modern science.[49]

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through the Diamond Sutra, Buddha teaches us the fundamental illusion character of form, that form is empty, fleeting, and non-inherent self. Form comprises aggregates as parts of a car; not an independent self, and aggregates change constantly; there is no such fixed phenomenon in this

[49] Thurman, R. (2013, March 11). *Buddhist contributions to physics, biology, and psychology* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1jMhZ-n3Jg

conventional world. Through many research studies, scientists have proved that the brain alters our perception, continually filters and interprets sensory information; what we receive from the environment will be converted into electrical signals and transmitted to the brain's sensory cortex, processed to create perception. The brain constantly generates predictions about the input sensory data and compares them with actual sensory data. Any discrepancies between forecasts will lead to errors that the brain uses to update its predictions and refine its understanding of the world. Prior knowledge can influence how we perceive the world; for example, if we have already experienced a particular smell, we will perceive it more readily. Emotions also shape our perceptions. For example, when we are in a good mood, we usually see more positive aspects of a situation. Based on the above facts, we can never know the truth when sensory inputs go through many influences and processes.

In the Diamond Sutra, Buddha teaches to deconstruct the ego, the I, by emphasizing the emptiness that all phenomena, including the self, are empty of inherent existence, and all depend on temporal causes and conditions. The Sutra emphasizes that all phenomena are ephemeral and impermanent; this also teaches to dismantle the belief that there is a stable self. Buddha says that our confused notion of "self" is the most damaging misconception about reality. "By deflating our conventional notion of 'self', and understanding what we really are, the Buddha says we will be able to undermine duhkha."[50] "By deflating the 'self,' the most practical outcome is the room it creates for compassion, we see that we all suffer for the same reason, that we live a transient lives of ignorance"[51] Buddha emphasizes the detachment of our sense objects: do not cling to see, hear, smell, taste, to eradicate suffering, give without attachment to self, liberate being

[50], [51] Maden, J. (2023, April). *Anātman, the Buddhist doctrine of no-self: Why "you" do not exist*. Philosophy Break. https://philosophybreak.com/articles/anatman-buddhist-doctrine-of-no-self-why-you-do-not-really-exist/

without the notion of self and others. Buddha posits that we should let go of all concepts, even the Dharma, because Dharma is still phenomenal and, therefore, not honest. Buddha advises us to transcend all concepts, to experience directly, and attain the Enlightenment through Realization. Thich Nhat Hanh - teaching of interbeing, describes our deep interconnection to everything and the fact that we do not exist independently. "Look deeply into ourselves; we can see our parents and ancestors, the cultures, and the plants."[52] I understand why Buddha asks that we practice experience. With our limited configuration of mind and senses, we will never be able to see the Real, the true Nature, the Enlightenment. Over two thousand five hundred years ago, civilization, knowledge, and science did not support our understanding of elusive form. Discussing cosmological theories, mathematics, and metaphysical speculation will not yield valuable results. Buddha is practical; his concern was helping beings awaken to the cause of suffering and how to end suffering.

"I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering."

Majjhima Nikaya 22

Buddha was like a physician, diagnosing illness (dukkha), identifying its cause (craving), and prescribing the cure (The Noble Eightfold Path). He said his teaching was like a raft to cross the river, not something to carry after reaching the other shore.

As science progresses significantly, it still struggles to figure out a mathematical model that proves what Buddha saw and thought. Based on his multiverse discussion, Dr. Michio Kaku, a well-known physicist and co-founder of string field theory, suggests that Nirvana is at the level

[52] Hanh, T. N. (2006). *Understanding our mind: 50 verses on Buddhist psychology*. Parallax Press.

of the 11th dimension.[53] Imagine this is 2560 years away from Buddha's time. We are in the third dimension plus time, probably the fourth dimension. I wonder how many thousands more years it will take us to reach the knowledge of the 11th dimension. I am intrigued by what Buddha knows so much, which led me to Buddha's saying.

"Monks, what I have known with direct knowledge is vast, like all leaves in the forest. What I have taught you is like the handful of leaves in my hand. I have taught only what is useful for liberation."

Samyutta Nikaya (SN 56.31)

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